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ABSTRACT

This two-part pamphlet assists parents and teachers in setting appropriate limits on children's behavior. Part 1 begins by illustrating the differences between punishment and discipline. It points to four basic reasons for misbehavior: (1) attention; (2) power; (3) revenge; or (4) inadequacy. Each of these reasons are fully defined, and advice for dealing with the behavior is presented. Developmental milestones in the first two years, the preschool years, and middle childhood are discussed in an effort to characterize meaningful and appropriate expectations of children's behavior. Part 1 ends with a listing of key points addressed in the articles, and activities to assist in setting appropriate limits. The second pamphlet begins with a discussion of the three basic parenting styles: the yielder, the enforcer, and the negotiator. Strategies are presented to help parents and teachers reduce discipline problems, including: (1) proper environment; (2) limits; (3) empathy; (4) share the control; (5) share the reasoning; (6) use choice; (7) maintain self-control; and (8) be consistent. Guidance in dealing with undesirable behavior, including teaching natural consequences, logical consequences, time-out, and redirection, is presented. The guide ends with activities which reinforce key points addressed in the articles. (SD)

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Appropriate Limits for Young Children

a guide for discipline, part one

ED 403 989

Denita is 5 years old. She whines not only when she is left in child care, but during most other times when she goes from one place to another. Once she gets interested in an activity, Denita's attention is completely focused until another child tries to join her or she is asked to put the activity away. Then she lashes out, usually throwing a toy or disrupting a corner of the room. During group time, she cries until she is allowed to sit on the teacher's lap. Teachers give her time-outs in the beanbag chair, which she doesn't seem to mind. When it is time to go home, she cries. Her teachers and parents are frustrated.

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How can Denita's teachers and parents work toward more desirable behavior?

Should she be punished or disciplined?

Punishment is taking some action against the child as a pay-back for a child's behavior.

Discipline is shaping a child, teaching the child to understand limits at home or in other settings. While you can make rules for how they should behave, most children do not begin acting with self-control until their middle childhood years (around ages 7 to 9). For children younger than this, discipline is learning self-control.

Children must pass through several learning and developmental stages as they mature. Discipline problems are a normal part of child development. While it appears that there are "good" and "bad" behaviors, each stage does have a positive and a negative side. Parents and teachers alike must understand these developmental stages in order to determine what behavior they can realistically expect and to decide whether a child's behavior is appropriate.

Why Do Children Misbehave?

According to some child development experts, children usually misbehave for one of four basic reasons: attention, power, revenge, or inadequacy.

Attention — When children believe they "belong" only when they are noticed. They feel important when they are commanding total attention.

While Mother was getting ready for work, Amanda jumped up from her breakfast and asked Mom to come help her in the bathroom. Encouraging her that she could manage alone, Amanda began to pull on Mom's leg and whine, "But I may not be able to." Mom replied, "Yes, you can, Amanda, just try it." After a few minutes, Amanda was back asking Mom to snap her pants. Helping her, Mom resumed her routine. Amanda called to her again, "Can you come here?"

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Parents can respond by giving positive attention at other times, ignoring inappropriate behavior, setting up routines, encouraging, redirecting, or setting up special times.

Power — When children believe they belong only when they are in control or are proving that no one can "boss them around."

Whitney was ready to go shopping when Dad announced they were going to the mall. She grabbed her jar of pennies, ready to shop. At each store, she asked for items too costly for her budget. When she found an item for less than a dollar, she counted out the pennies and paid. Having spent her money, she continued to whine for other things "she needed". Mom said, "We will need to just leave if you can't quit asking for things." She begged not to leave, so browsing continued.

A short time later, she asked for another special item she had seen and loudly insisted she have it. This time Dad tried to get her quiet but had lost patience. "You're mean!" she screamed. She gave a glaring stare and mumbled "You don't love me." Dad took her hand and led her to the car. When she got home, the dollar toy was left in the car, forgotten.

Parents can respond with kind-but firm respect, giving limited choices, setting reasonable limits, encouraging, and redirecting the child to a more acceptable activity. When children test their limits and use a public display to assert themselves, parents can continue to stick to the basic rules letting them know their behavior is unacceptable. Leave the situation if possible (store or home in which you are a guest). Talk when things are calmer at a later time.

Revenge — When children believe they belong only by hurting others, since they feel hurt themselves.

Larry had been whining when Mom left him each morning with the child care provider. That evening, Dad was cooking dinner while Mom worked late. Suddenly Logan screamed. Dad threw down the potato peeler and ran to see what the problem was. Larry had pinned Logan in a wrestling position and was twisting his ear. Dad hollered to Larry, saying "Why can't you leave your brother alone? Go to your room and wait for me!"

Sometimes the reason for misbehavior is not clear. When there is a new pattern of acting out, children and parents should talk about how they are feeling. Parents can respond by avoiding harsh punishment and criticism, building trust, listening, reflecting feelings, practicing sharing of feelings, encouraging strengths and acting with care.

Inadequacy — when children believe they belong only when they convince others not to expect anything of them since they are helpless or unable.

Jorge's teacher asked his parents what might be affecting Jorge's work at school. His teacher says, "He doesn't complete assignments and no matter how much I help him, he gets further behind." Mom replied, "He doesn't do anything at home either. I have quit asking him to do any chores at home because when he does them, he is so sloppy and does it so badly, I have to do it again."

Parents can respond by encouraging their children to try things, focusing on the child's strengths, not criticizing or giving in to pity, offering opportunities for success and teaching skills in small steps.

Developmental Milestones

The First Two Years

From birth to about age 2, infants need to build close relationships with their parents or other important people around them. These attachments make it possible for infants to build a sense of love and caring. They are learning to make sense out of permanent objects and developing a sense of trust. Only as children experiment through touching, dropping, pushing, and pulling do they begin to learn.

During this time, children do not believe that things exist unless they can see them. This is why it is so difficult for them to be away from their parents.

To feel close to someone, infants need to be able to count on having their needs met in a timely manner. Gaining a sense of trust is the first stage of their emotional development.

The Preschool Years

These years are the most significant in a person's life. Language and social skills are developed. Children at this age also learn symbols. For example, they learn to see a picture of a ball and recognize that the picture represents a real ball. Recognizing symbols is an important step toward developing important skills such as the ability to read.

Toddling, exploring, and pounding may worry parents, but they are normal behaviors. When children touch, feel, look, mix, turn over, and throw, they are developing skills. Exploration is intellectually healthy and helps children test their independence. Although these behaviors create a struggle between child and parent, they should be expected and should plan for them.

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Independence is an emotion to be encouraged during the early preschool years. The alternative is shame and doubt. Many significant events occur during these years (between 2 and 3, toilet training and language in particular). In responding to a child's misuse of language or accidents when toileting, parents and caregivers should be sensitive to avoid using guilt and punishments for what are most likely normal acts of development.

Once children learn to handle independence, they are ready to develop a healthy sense of initiative. Initiative means starting activities, creating, and working. Children who learn to start their own activities lay the groundwork for positive and productive school experiences. Again, explorations, questions, and investigations play major roles in development.

Middle Childhood

From the time they begin school until around age 12, children are in middle childhood, when learning skills become better defined. Children at this stage have higher-order thinking skills and can use them to make more complex decisions. As children they have always believed what adults say as basically true, but they now begin to question the pedestal upon which they have placed adults.

Rules become more significant and children learn not only rules for games, but rules that will help them understand math concepts and social rules, such as saying "please" and "thank you." Rules make formal education possible.

Closely on the heels of developing a sense of initiative in the preschool years is the development of a sense of industry. Groundwork is laid during this middle childhood for becoming productive members of society. Children can learn to be inferior (or inadequate). Adults should seek to build a sense of confidence that children in the middle childhood can do jobs well. Many children have their sense of industry undermined by well-meaning parents and teachers who mistakenly try to use criticism to motivate them.

Questioning Adult Responses: A Group Teaching Guide

Children spend their young years trying to figure out how they fit into the world. How independent or dependent will they be allowed to be? What will be the consequences of various actions? Who will give them direction? Who will be their role models?

In addition to the reasons for behaviors, parents must determine if they have provided a stable, loving, understanding place to help children learn and grow. The questions that follow may be used as small group activities or between parenting partners. It may be helpful to consider these questions:

Are expectations for the child clear? Children develop at different rates, have different interests, and certainly have different kinds of homes and families. Are attempts made to prepare the child for new situations? Offer explanations of what the occasion is about and what behavior will be expected so guessing isn't necessary. To prevent reactions, use continuous two-way communication and allow the child a certain amount of responsibility in setting his or her own rules or limits.

Is behavior driven by the child's need to test the boundaries of particular relationships? There is security for children who realize that the adult will "still love them" if they are "bad." This may be particularly true when there have been many changes in the family home.

Are consistent limits understood and followed? Children may resist limits if there is too much adult control and not enough room allowed for their choice. Discipline allows children to develop their own "inner voice," which will sensibly guide their behavior as they grow. Often adults must be careful that they, too, follow the rules they make for children. Consistency plays a major role in parenting.

Key Points

- Discipline is shaping and teaching a child to understand limits.
- Children may act out because they want attention.
- Children may act out because they need some control.
- Children may hurt others because they don't feel important.
- Parents can ask questions such as, "How can you behave differently the next time?"
- Parents can prepare the child for new situations by describing expected behaviors.
- Parents who understand stages of behavior will know better what to expect.

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Appropriate Limits for Young Children: A Group Teaching Guide

The group leader sets the tone for the group to allow informal sharing, a sense of understanding and confidentiality without ridicule. Parenting is a very personal topic. Often to set the participants at ease and ease transitions, activities are needed. Some suggested activities are presented here as a stimulus for group leaders.

Activity:

Ask the group participants to imagine a child with whom they have come in contact, one who they see daily or quite often. Ask them to think of ways to characterize this child. List these terms on easel paper or on a writing board before the group.

Activity:

Scene setting descriptions of children to use for discussion. How would you respond to these situations:

Daryl is 4 years old. He cries when Mom leaves him at day care. He plays but is subdued. He can't seem to concentrate to finish puzzles and other tasks. He won't zip his jacket and tries to leave the group. The teacher shouts to the child to stay with the group and thinks he is just trying to get attention.

Marilyn is an attractive 2-year-old child with an advanced vocabulary. She enjoys most learning activities but has trouble sitting still during group time and during meal time and naps. Marilyn is very loving but independent, often creatively precocious. When asked to "come here" by parents and teachers, she often plays games and runs away.

Activity:

On index cards, ask parents to list the characteristics of ideal children, one characteristic per card. Take the cards and mix them up, then have each participant draw a card and read that characteristic aloud.

Activity:

Ask participants to describe their definition of discipline. After this has been discussed, ask for their definition of punishment.

Activity:

Ask participants to brainstorm in small groups or as a large group regarding their ideas about why children misbehave.

Activity:

Divide into small groups, allowing parents to share misbehavior incidents. Try to decide which goal may have generated the child's behavior at that time.

Dreikurs, R. (1964) *Children the Challenge*. New York: Hawthorne Press.
Dreikurs R. & Grey, L. (1968). *A new approach to discipline: Logical consequences*. New York: Hawthorne.

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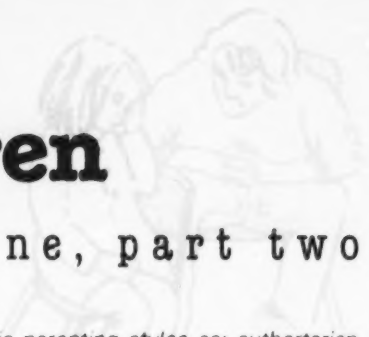
Appropriate Limits for Young Children

a guide for discipline, part two



Although researchers have characterized the three basic parenting styles as: authortarian, permissive, and authoritative, many parents do not fit neatly into any of these categories. Parenting knowledge comes from a variety of sources and parents combine many styles depending on any given situation. With this in mind, this publication will examine these three parenting styles, referred to The Enforcer (authoritarian), The Negotiator (authoritative), and The Yielder (permissive). By examining the statements given for each parenting style, parents and caregivers can think about their basic style. Parenting styles influence the way in which children develop.

Parenting styles*

The Yielder

- It is better to have no rules than to worry about breaking them.
- Children can get along pretty well if you just leave them alone.
- My work and home responsibilities are too stressful; I can't worry about what the children are doing.
- The children won't listen to me, so I have quit trying.
- Children should realize that my work is stressful and I am tired at the end of the day.

These statements were written to describe the permissive parent or the yielder. This parent makes few demands, administers little punishment, sets no guidelines, has little structure, and avoids asserting authority. He or she is often referred to as uninvolved and spends minimal time and effort with the child. The parent sometimes uses stress and work to excuse himself or herself from spending time with the children; drugs and immaturity can also be reasons for their lack of involvement.

The child of this parent lacks self-control, is immature, may be aggressive at home, and may behave irresponsibly. These children tend to have poor self-esteem, low emotional development, and a low threshold for frustration. They may be school-skippers and resort to drugs or become involved in legal problems in their search for attention.

The Enforcer

- Children should obey their parents and not talk back.
- Children should do as I say until they are old enough to make their own decisions.
- I was spanked when I was a child and I turned out okay.

** Group leaders may turn this section into a questionnaire as an alternate activity for parents to respond to their parenting style or beliefs.*

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- When children don't mind, I yell at them and threaten them with a variety of punishments.
- I expect my children to conform to my decisions without discussion.

These statements reflect the general nature of the enforcer or authoritarian style. This parent is demanding and strict, uses punishment, and generally doesn't allow choice or freedom of expression. They value obedience, tradition, and order, and discourage independence and individuality. These parents dislike having their authority questioned. They may use physical punishment, yelling or threatening for disciplinary measures.

What kind of child comes from this discipline pattern? Research indicates an enforcer parent may produce a child who lacks spontaneity, curiosity, and creativity, and often has limited independence and assertiveness. These children don't learn how to decide for themselves, depending instead on others for their sense of control. They may have low self-esteem and be aggressive and defiant.

The Negotiator

- Children should be given choices.
- Sometimes children have a point. I try to listen to them.
- Although it takes hard work, parents and children should try to talk about family decisions and let each person share his or her feelings.
- Children should be allowed to be individuals.
- I take care not to criticize my children or call names even when I cannot understand why they act as they do.

The negotiator (authoritative) parent, although not the perfect parent, has a better balance in discipline style, setting high standards and expectations for mature behavior, firmly enforcing rules, and encouraging independence and individuality. Children's individual rights are recognized and choices are given. There is better communication and listening and a more democratic give-and-take arrangement.

Children of these parents generally are competent, responsible, independent, have higher self-esteem and confidence, and are better able to control their aggression.

How to Reduce Discipline Problems

It is important for parents to realize that in order for children to grow-up, they *must* pass through the experiences of childhood. There is no way around it. The experience of growing up causes distress and frustration. Reducing behavior problems can be best practiced through *prevention*. If parents can understand what to expect from children as they develop, this knowledge can be used to build a healthy environment and a clear set of expectations that can reduce some of the tensions.

Major concepts to remember are *consistency, forethought, respect, recognition of a child's limits, cooperative relationships, common sense,* and *sense of humor.* Discipline is guiding children toward learning behaviors and self-control for later life.

The following list may help parents and teachers to evaluate their environment as well as their interactions with children.

Prepare the Environment

- Are there enough supplies and materials so that children will not have to share too many items and wait too long for others?
- Is the environment well organized? Are some areas cluttered?
- Are there areas where the child can feel in control (one-person corner, own room)?
- Are there a variety of play materials to allow choices?
- Do offered activities suit the child's ability?
- Can barriers to success be removed to avoid frustration (turn over the puzzle pieces)?
- Is waiting kept to a realistic level (for turns, meals, listening)?
- Is the area childproofed?

Set Limits

- Are older (school-age) children involved in designing limits or rules?
- Are limits reasonable?
- Are limits based on the child's ability to meet and understand limit?
- Are explanations and reasons for the limits appropriate to children's language skills?
- Is positive language used (do and should)?
- Is the child given time to comply with the limit?
- Are comparisons avoided to prevent resentment and damaging self-esteem?
- Are adults acting as positive role models?
- Is moderation used in reactions? For example: "I like the way you are playing!" or "I see you are ready to begin. Here is the glue."
- Are desirable behaviors reinforced, remembering that the child is not a "good" or "bad" child?

Use Empathy

- Is support and kindness used in all communication?
- Are the child's words reflected to clarify understanding ("you mean ...")?
- Does the tone of voice and a smile convey empathy?
- Is a relationship being developed with the child?
- Is the child aware of the adult's "hot" button?

Share the Control

- Are children allowed some of the control, or is it important for the adult to call every shot?
- Are children listened to for their newly developing ideas?
- Is there an atmosphere of give-and-take?
- Is a menu of choices presented?
- Can incomplete sentences and open-ended questions be posed to compel the child to think and formulate decisions? ("What do you think will happen if ...?")
- Are questions sincere? (How are you going to solve that? What should we do about that?)

Share the Reasoning

- Are children encouraged to figure out solutions?
- Are nods and positive responses given as children begin to make choices and decisions?
- Are options presented when guidance is required?

Use Choice

- Is choice allowed at an early age no matter how small the decision (such as sock color)?
- Is the child given two choices that the adult is willing to live with and experience?
- Are the choices given all safe ones?

Maintain Self-Control and Understand the Development of Self-Control

- Are discussions held following tantrums or angry outbursts?
- Are outlets for anger provided?
- Is time-out used appropriately?
- Are alternatives and redirection used instead of threats and bribes?

Be Consistent

- Are personal consequences considered before making suggestions?
- Is there a plan for following through to check on these suggested activities?
- Is there trust between the child and adult?

Some Ways to Deal With Endless Undesirable Behaviors

Besides learning about child developmental stages and planning ways to prevent situations that can lead to undesirable behavior, parents and teachers may need to decide how to manage some behaviors.

Natural Consequences

Many times, children learn as a result of natural consequences. For example, a child who will not eat supper during mealtime may feel hungry when he or she is not be allowed to eat again until breakfast. Or a child who forgets to put skates away each night may one day find that they have been stolen.

Logical Consequences

When natural consequences are not safe or appropriate, logical consequences may be used. Children often can help set these (and are often stricter on themselves than a parent would have been). The consequences of behavior should relate somehow to the behavior. Referred to as logical consequences, the child can directly see how the behavior and the consequence relate. For example, if the child oversteps his or her boundaries when riding a bike, taking away the bike for a reasonable amount of time may be the consequences. Or if toys are not put away, a reasonable consequence may be to collect the toys for charity or at least put them in temporary storage.

Time-Out

In early childhood, children are very self-centered. It is normal. Children believe the world revolves around them! Children become confused and frustrated when they must face the fact that they are not the center of the universe. They need adult guidance as they begin to find appropriate ways to vent their feelings and develop a sense of self-control.

Time-out is often used with children who have briefly lost self-control. Self-control is a developmental process. Until the young child has learned to see beyond themselves and has the ability to see things through someone else's eyes, it is difficult to change self-centered behaviors.

Most children will be 7 and older before they can begin to talk about the consequences of and plan for their own behavior. A big part of self-evaluation is social comparison. Social comparison is the act of learning from role models, imitating them, and using appropriate behaviors in a variety of settings.

Time-out can be very effective when used sparingly and appropriately. Time alone gives the child a chance to calm down. Then the child may rejoin the activity. Children who view time out as a punishment may not use the time out situation as the caregiver intends. Rather than calming down or reflecting on how he or she should behave, the child may spend time figuring out how to get even!

These questions may help you decide when to use time-out:

- Is time-out being used as a time for the child to regroup?
- Is time-out used as a retreat for the child; not the adult?
- Is time-out used out as one answer among other alternatives?
- Are children given the chance to have some control by making choices about their daily activities?

Use time-outs sparingly. When a time-out is used, do so because the child needs it and not because you are angry. Also, be sure the length of time is appropriate and is made clear to the child.

Instead of yelling "Go to the time-out area and sit there until I say to get up," try saying "I see you are having trouble keeping your feet to yourself. It hurts other children when they are kicked. You need to sit alone for 5 minutes. Then you will be able to come back to the group." Or you might say, "If you continue to play rough with the ball, you will have to sit out the rest of the game."

Think carefully about time-out as an aid in handling inappropriate or unsafe behaviors while preserving self-esteem and control for children and adults.

- Are assurances used to support the child who has lost self-control?
- Are assurances made by the adult to maintain self-control (mental counting, leaving the room)?

Redirection

Another way to help children gain control is to redirect them to another activity. This allows the child to get away from the problem situation and yet still have something constructive to do. Redirecting children may be preferable to time-out.

Suggest an alternative activity or setting when a situation is about to get out of hand. Pose timely questions to avoid heated confrontation and conflict.

Setting Appropriate Limits for Young Children: A Group Teaching Guide

The group leader sets the tone for the group to allow informal sharing, confidentiality, a sense of understanding and confidentiality without ridicule. Parenting is a very personal topic. Often to set the participants at ease and to smooth transitions, activities are needed. Some suggested activities are presented here as a stimulus for group leaders.

Activity:

Ask the group participants to imagine a child with whom they have come in contact, one who they see daily or quite often. Ask them to think of ways to characterize this child. List these terms on easel paper, or on a writing board before the group.

Activity:

In small groups, ask parents to work together to think of all the methods they use to discipline children. Have them bring the list before the total group before beginning to outline those in the guidesheet.

Activity:

On index cards, ask parents to list things about their child that they do not like, one characteristic per card. Take the cards and mix them up, then have each participant draw a card and read that characteristic aloud. Use this activity to turn that characteristic around into a positive aspect; such as talking back could mean that the child will learn to question things, which may come in handy during adolescence when tempted with illegal or immoral practices; or that asking for everything in sight in a store may mean that the child has not gained a sense of self-control yet.

Activity:

Ask participants to describe their definition of discipline. After this has been discussed, ask for their definition of punishment. See Part 1 of this guidesheet series for further definitions.

Activity:

Ask participants to brainstorm in small groups or as a large group about the types of parents with whom they have come in contact. Summarize characteristics. Define a "perfect" parent.

Activity:

Discuss what you consider to be ongoing undesirable behavior. When do children's behaviors seem to be in need of "professional" counsel or parents in need of outside assistance?

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